

Honorable Senators and Representatives,

My name is Marybeth McNamara. I am a proud graduate student at the University Of Connecticut School Of Social Work.

I am here today to testify on Bill number 6600, "An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan." I am in favor of this legislation and strongly encourage you to support it.

I am so very lucky to sit before you tonight because it was access to quality health care that held my family together and saved my life.

Eight years ago, I became very ill and was admitted to the hospital. Fourteen days into my hospital stay, I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. (For those who are unfamiliar with Crohn's Disease, it is a chronic disease of the digestive system for which there is not yet a cure.) I spent 29 days in the hospital. I was discharged home on more than 30 pills per day for the 3 months following my diagnosis. Thankfully, I was still covered under my parents' health insurance plan during that period.

Now that I am old enough to support myself, my biggest worry is about losing health insurance. I know what it means to have a "pre-existing condition." I can never let my insurance lapse, not even for one day, for fear of never finding quality, affordable care again. Sometimes I feel as if I am being held hostage by the current system.

Thankfully, I am no longer paying 487 dollars per month for COBRA payments because I recently became eligible for coverage through my part-time job at a local grocery store. My number one worry is that after I graduate from UConn I will not be able to find a job that offers health insurance. Access to quality, affordable health care is my number one priority.

I still consider myself lucky. My disease has been in remission for 2 years. I am able to work hard and complete graduate school. However, I never lose sight of how quickly life can change. We are all vulnerable to this issue.

It is an absolute shame that there are people in this country who are losing their homes due to this issue. People's lives hang in the balance as we speak about this today. The people in this state do not deserve to worry about losing their homes while they battle illness.

Sustinet would offer all Connecticut residents the peace of mind they deserve.

That is why we can't keep making excuses. We can't keep telling people they have to wait because in many cases, waiting means getting sicker.

The economic turmoil and poor job market only magnify the issue and reinforce the need for Sustinet. There are people in every town of this state who are looking to you for serious leadership during these difficult times. The nation is watching. Now is the time to prove that you take this issue seriously.

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions you may have.

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